

58 U05 Nolan at Balaklava : Part VIII: More on the 'Threes right!' Order in the Charge of the Light Brigade

by Dr Douglas J Austin U 05

In Part VI of this series [This journal, 29(4), 31-40, 2012], I presented **FIVE** accounts (dated 1884-1899) of the title incident and concluded that QMG Richard Airey's aide-de-camp, Captain Lewis Nolan, while in front of the 17th Lancers - on the left of the first line of the Light Brigade - issued an order to go "Threes right!". According to "Queen's Regulations", he was NOT exceeding his authority, although Raglan later (falsely) asserted that he had done so. Nolan may in fact have been instructed to guide the Light Brigade - but did not inform Lucan or Cardigan to that effect.

If obeyed by the Brigade, Nolan's order would have diverted them away from their advance to the east - into the North Valley killing ground - and towards (or over) the Causeway Heights. Thus, Arthur Tremayne, then a Captain commanding 'E' Troop of the 13th Light Dragoons, wrote:- *...But I have no doubt that Lord Raglan's intentions were that Lord Lucan should, with some part of his Division advance, probably by way of the South valley, wheel over the Causeway and prevent the guns the Turks had left behind from being taken away. This Lord Raglan's A.D.C. Lord Westmorland, subsequently told me. Lord Lucan could then have decided whether he could have gone on to the gorge of the North valley or not.* Tremayne's memoir appeared in "Balaklava—A Participants Account" in 'The 13th/18th Royal Hussars Journal', pp 66-67, December, 1967, and post-dates February, 1860 (when Tremayne was appointed Lieutenant-Colonel of the 13th LD). It may have been influenced by later accounts.

Many thanks to Sue Graves, we now have a **SIXTH** description of Nolan's 'Threes right!' order - given as the Light Brigade set off towards their (unintended) target. From her interesting article on "David Stanley 1830-1893" [This journal, 33(2), 27-28, 2016]*, I quote:- "...Stanley, and a fellow charger Francis Dickenson, were interviewed by the local newspaper, *The Sheffield and Rotherham Independent*." In the 3rd Edition of Laurence Crider's major work "*In Search of the Light Brigade*", 2011, 1009 Private Stanley and 847 Sergeant Dickenson, both of the 17th Lancers, are credited as "Chargers". Below, I **emphasise** the key part of Stanley's narrative, which appeared in that paper on Saturday 23 October 1875, and reads as follows:- "...In the charge of the Light Brigade, and Lord Cardigan was in the front of our regiment when Captain Nolan brought the order. He told Cardigan he was to charge and take the guns. He was asked "What guns?" He says "There's the guns, my lord, and here's the order. You're to charge and take them.". Cardigan threw his sword in the air, and said "Here goes the last of the Cardigans!". Nolan said he would go with him. We were all very much excited, but started without delay. **The first order was; as I understood, after we had started the charge. "Three's right", which was taken to mean that we must take the guns on the right. In a moment afterwards we were ordered to "Front and forward", and at that moment Captain Nolan was shot dead.** I rode right to the Russian cavalry..." I take it that Stanley's phrase "**take the guns on the right**" can only refer to (at least) the British guns in Redoubts 3 and 2 on the Causeway Heights. Stanley stated that Nolan spoke directly to Cardigan, but this is not yet proven, although other accounts indicate that Nolan asked "Is the Light Cavalry afraid?" and that Cardigan replied "By God! If I come through this alive, I'll have you court-martialled for speaking to me in that manner!" (It is, however, certain that Cardigan did tell Queen Victoria that he tried - and failed - to question Nolan as to "Lord Raglan's **real** intention" as the Light Brigade moved off.)

The **SIX** accounts - all by troopers in the 17th Lancers - were produced by 870 Corporal James Iken Nunnerley (1st Squadron), by an unnamed trooper, by 1004 Corporal Thomas Morley (D troop : 2nd squadron) and by 1009 Private David Stanley. Nunnerley did not record any

counter-order, but Morley stated in the WASHINGTON POST: 22 May 1892: p 16. "The French chasseurs d'Afrique had attempted a charge and lost about fifty men. Now came our order to charge. At a hundred yards we broke into a trot. Just then Capt. Nolan, it would seem, realized that the charge was to be down the valley to certain destruction, and that someone had blundered. He shouted and waved his sword to the right. In obedience my troop leader, Capt. Winton [Winter], shouted, 'Second squadron, three's right.' We obeyed, and it brought the right troop of the second squadron in the rear of the left troop of the first squadron. [**The 17th Lancers were quickly counter-ordered to "Front forward!" - see below**] We went 'three's left.' when a shell burst in our midst, killing Capt. Nolan and a dozen men, and dismounting several others. Some one shouted, 'Nothing but speed will save us.' Morley further stated in the WASHINGTON POST: 24 June 1894: p 19. "I did not see the arrival of the order for us to move, and, of course, when we were ordered forward I hardly knew what we were going to do. I was a non-commissioned officer and consequently at the end of the line, right flank of the second squadron [**D troop**] in the Seventeenth Lancers. They were known as the "Death or Glory" Lancers. As we started down the slope I saw the action of Capt. Nolan which has been the subject of so much controversy. He was the aid-de-camp who brought the order for us to move. After Lord Cardigan and the brigade had struck a good trot Nolan saw that the movement was directed straight down the valley instead of against the batteries at the right. He shouted and waved his sword toward the right. My troop leader, Capt. Winter, evidently understood it, for he gave the order, 'Second Squadron, threes right,' and we obeyed. This brought the right troop of the second squadron in the rear of the left troop of the first squadron. At this moment a piece of shell struck Nolan and killed him. He gave a most peculiar, unearthly scream, and his horse galloped back, throwing his lifeless body off as it turned and dashed through the intervals between the lines. I heard Corp. Nunnerley, still living at Ormskirk, shout "Threes left; forward!" and we went left and on down the valley at great speed. [**The 17th Lancers paused briefly to reform their line, wrongly seen as a "Lower curb chains!" operation (not a British cavalry action) by a French observer.**] In the next instant a shell burst right in our troop and killed or dismounted a dozen or so. My horse was knocked down, but not wounded, and got up without throwing me."

In his article "The Light Cavalry Brigade 25 October 1854" [This journal, 13(3), 30-32, October 1995], Arthur Waddle presented his findings of the detailed dispositions of the Light Brigade as they formed up. He assigned Nolan as "*With the 2nd Squadron, 17th Lancers*" and noted the 1st squadron of the 17th Lancers as the "*Squadron of Direction*". Using his results, it can be understood from Figure 1 why a "Three's right!" manoeuvre by the 2nd Squadron would indeed bring the D troop of the second squadron in the rear of C troop of the first squadron.

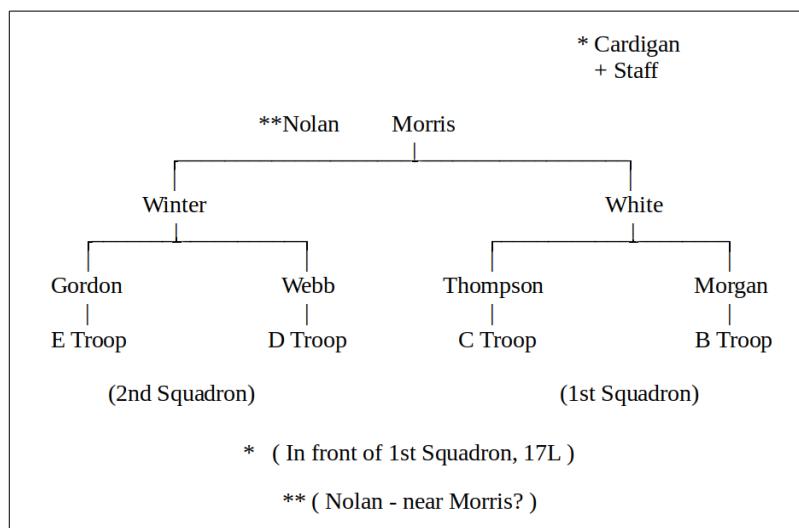


Figure 1 : Disposition of the 17th Lancers before "The Charge" (adapted from Waddle)

The "Cardigan Military Papers" are held in the Northamptonshire Record Office. Here, I refer to NRO N/XV/9(1), which gives Cardigan's hand-written replies to serious direct questions from Alexander Kinglake - then finalising Volume IV of his "*Invasion of the Crimea*". I extract as follows:-

"Feby 1868. Having received from Mr Kinglake a certain list of Questions with regard to the battle of Balaklava & other matters in the Crimea under the head of "Antecedents" I hasten to answer them

... 3. With respect to the Lt Brigade not attacking when the Heavy Brigade charged! Answer — I had received positive orders from Ld Lucan to remain & protect a certain pass — Ld Lucan ordered me personally to attack anything coming up the pass excepting close column of Infantry —

[Reply 3 is unexceptionable and shows that, earlier in the day, Lucan in person gave a direct order to Cardigan, which he obeyed. Captain William Morris (commanding the 17th Lancers) and others judged that a golden opportunity to destroy Russian cavalry was thereby lost.]

... 4. How is Ld Cardigan's statement on that subject reconciled with the fact of his having on his part moved the Brigade? Answer — I did so by the positive order of a Superior officer brought by an A.D.C. My being recommended to do so by an inferior officer is entirely fictitious. During this advance Capn Morris comg. the 17th Lancers broke away from the Column advancing for the purpose of acting independently with his own regiment — Everybody is of opinion that any advance then must would have been useless — No officer can move from a Brigade without orders — I ordered the Regt. back in Brigade —..."

[N.B. I must emphasize that Reply 4 does NOT relate to Reply 3, but rather to the transmission of the written 4th Order by Nolan to Lucan and then by Lucan's direct attack order to Cardigan. I read this as clear-cut evidence that Nolan did not pass a diversionary order to Cardigan but did so to the 17th Lancers. Furthermore, at least part of that regiment began to execute Nolan's "Threes right!" order - but was ordered back into line by Cardigan.]

I therefore conclude that Captain Lewis Nolan, while in front of the 17th Lancers - on the left of the first line of the Light Brigade - issued an order to go "Threes right!" as described in Parts VI, and now Part VIII, of my series.

As a service to map enthusiasts, I present a copy of Map A - annexed to Colonel Mayow's second affidavit in the Cardigan v Calthorpe action in the Queen's Bench in 1863. The text reads:- "In the Queen's Bench. This is the Map or Plan referred to in the Affidavit of George Mynell Mayow sworn before me this 30th day of May, 1863 (illegible) // In the Queen's Bench. This is the Map or Plan referred to in the Affidavit of Daniel Hugh Clutterbuck sworn before me this 30th day of May, 1863 (illegible)". Mayow's affidavit reads:- "George Mayow (Brigade Major to the Light Cavalry in 1854) made Oath as follows: "I look on the Map or plan now produced and shown to me and marked A and annexed to this my Affidavit and I say that according to the best of my judgement such Map or plan does faithfully and accurately exhibit the features of the ground where the Light Cavalry Charge took place and also that the positions of the Troops which came under my own observation videlicet the the original positions of the English and Russian troops including the Batteries the position of a portion of the 17th Lancers with whom I was when I observed the Bridge over the aqueduct as mentioned in my former Affidavit - the position of the 8th Hussars when I joined them beyond the Russian Guns as mentioned in my former Affidavit and the position of the Heavy Brigade as they covered the reforming of the Light Brigade are indicated upon the said map or plan with substantial correctness and accuracy."



Figure 2. "Mayow Map A" (colour adjusted) from Affidavit (May, 1863) : ex MPN 1_23 : National Archives, Kew

Acknowledgements: I thank The National Archives (Kew), the Discovery Museum (Newcastle upon Tyne) and the late Mr Edmund Brudenell for permission to publish items.